

Tranquilino Luna

1849–1892

TERRITORIAL DELEGATE 1881–1884
REPUBLICAN FROM NEW MEXICO

Tranquilino Luna was a transitional figure in New Mexico politics. A successful rancher and entrepreneur, Luna ran for the Territorial Delegate's seat in the U.S. House against Miguel A. Otero, a seasoned political veteran and a patron of early territorial politics. Their 1880 election campaign displayed the stark divide between the older, founding generation of territorial politicians and a successor generation bent on dictating the terms of New Mexico's political future. Once in Congress, Luna introduced a bill to create a state government and bring New Mexico into the Union. However, his controversial 1882 election sparked a conflict between warring political factions throughout the territory and prematurely ended his House career.

Tranquilino Luna was born on June 29, 1847, in Los Lunas, Valencia County, Mexico, to Antonio Jose Luna and Isabella Baca. According to one scholar, Antonio was quite wealthy. A merchant-farmer, Luna “grazed 45,000 sheep and had an annual income of \$25,000 at the height of his career.”¹ Tranquilino Luna's family was active in politics; his grandfather, Juan Baca, had served three terms in the territorial assembly as a representative of Valencia County.² One of nine children, Luna was educated in local public schools. Like the other offspring of affluent *nuevomexicanos* in the territory, Luna was sent to college in the United States. After graduating from the University of Missouri at Columbia, Luna returned to New Mexico to work in the livestock industry. In the late 1860s he married Amalia Jaramillo. The couple had one son, Maximiliano, who later became one of Theodore (Teddy) Roosevelt's Rough Riders in the Spanish-American War.³

In 1878 Republicans nominated Luna for Delegate at their convention, but “for the sake of harmony” he declined the offer to make way for Mariano S. Otero, whom he “promised to support ... heartily.” Two years later, when

Otero declined nomination for a second term, Luna sought to run for Delegate in the 47th Congress (1881–1883). In August 1880, the Republican Party unanimously nominated him as its candidate. The *Daily New Mexican* described the new nominee as a “man of kindly, energetic, and enterprising disposition and exceedingly popular among all classes, both of Americans and Mexicans wherever known.”⁴ In his acceptance speech at the nominating convention, Luna assured supporters, “I pledge most solemnly if elected to do all that lays in my power for the development and prosperity for the people, and ... the many and varied interests of our beloved Territory.” He vowed to address infrastructure improvements, including the expansion of the railroads. His campaign received a boost from the support of former Delegate José Francisco Chaves, a major political patron who campaigned for Luna in the northern counties of the territory.⁵ Luna's Democratic opponent was another towering figure in territorial politics, Mariano Otero's uncle, Miguel Otero, Sr., who had served as Territorial Delegate during the 34th through the 36th Congresses (1855–1861). At the time of Otero's tenure, the New Mexico territorial government was controlled by “National Democrats,” who aligned themselves with the Democratic presidential administrations in Washington and supported preserving slavery and secession.⁶ A Southern sympathizer, Otero tried to move New Mexico toward statehood and economic development by allying himself with powerful Southern Members of Congress. Although publicly Otero took a middle course on secession, questions about his loyalty forced him in 1860 to relocate with his family to Missouri, where they remained for the better part of a decade. This left him open to accusations in 1880 that he was little more than a carpetbagger, “a gentleman who was born in New Mexico but has lived for a great portion of his life in Colorado and Kansas.”⁷



A major campaign issue was the impact on territorial development of old land grants approved by the Spanish, Mexican, and New Mexican governments for prominent families. The question of whether the United States would honor individual claims to these large swaths of land when it acquired New Mexico had been resolved by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, but their private ownership hindered settlement and curtailed business opportunities created by the rise of the transcontinental railroad.⁸ Otero campaigned on the promise to resolve the impasse, though critics noted that he had been responsible—or at least had raised no objections—to efforts to secure patents for some of the largest grants in the 1850s.⁹

Memories of Otero's pro-Southern inclinations lingered in 1880, and his political opponents attacked this facet of his congressional service. Otero tried to turn his prior service to his advantage, arguing that experience trumped old political arguments. "I am acquainted with members of Congress; am conversant with the rules and methods by which business is done in the house ... and could go at once to work for the Territory without losing time in becoming acquainted with the details of parliamentary rules," Otero asserted. "Luna knows nothing of these things, and the five or six months which he would lose in learning them, would be employed by me profitably." Opponents countered that Congress had changed in Otero's two-decade absence. "Congressmen have died and disappeared and there remain few of Otero's colleagues, even those having long since forgotten him," wrote the *Daily New Mexican*. The newspaper's editors also insinuated that Otero was too old, that he possessed "no longer the manhood and ambition which might have urged him to prominence in past years and ... has not now the energy which should have produced work from him."¹⁰

Critics also charged Otero with pandering to *Hispano* constituents, whom they said he had denigrated as a Delegate in the 1850s. "In addressing himself to our Mexican residents he adroitly identifies with them and their interests and is full of ... sympathy and affection for his own race," wrote the editors of the *Daily New Mexican*. "No one would think from the cunning addresses that

Otero is ashamed that he was born a Mexican, but it is so."¹¹ Otero's camp countered by accusing "Luna of being implicated in land-grant feuds" and of "being an enemy of the Mexican."¹² Another Otero supporter, exemplifying the highly personalized politics of Territorial Delegate elections, warned Luna about the futility of campaigning in Las Vegas, New Mexico, an Otero stronghold.

"Tranquilino, stay at home, and forever give up the mistaken idea that you were cut out for a Congressman. It takes brains to be a member of Congress as well as a thorough familiarity with parliamentary usages and a keen insight into the needs of a rapidly-growing Territory. You certainly have common sense enough to know that you lack these requirements."¹³

Although Luna's supporters attacked Otero, Luna stated he did "not believe in the policy or decency of personal abuse or mud throwing. Of the Democratic nominee," he continued, "personally I have none but kind words to speak. Of his and his newspapers' policy of personality and no argument, I confidently leave the voters to judge." Luna's pledge not to turn the campaign into a personal popularity contest suggested a shift in the territorial elections in the 1880s in which national issues took precedence over the cult of personality.¹⁴ Luna focused on issues such as settling land grants and instituting a comprehensive public education system in the territory. "I believe in full and free education by compulsion if necessary," he said. "The school house speaks volumes, and wherever you find it you find a progressive, useful, and worthy people."¹⁵ In the end, Luna defeated Otero, with 53 to 47 percent of the vote.¹⁶ Although the newspapers reported no widespread voter abuse or fraud, Miguel Otero, Jr., recalled, "Rumors of great frauds ... were rife on the streets of every town in the Territory, and the Democrats made preparations to do what they could to check such tactics. But their results were unavailing." Otero, Jr., was dispatched to Socorro County "to watch for evidence of fraudulent practices" and to Valencia County, "where it was said they voted the sheep." In Valencia County, he claimed a precinct cast nearly 1,000 votes for Luna but not one for his father. The precinct "turned

out ... to be merely a sheep camp belonging to the Luna family,” but given the Republican control of the House, Miguel Otero, Sr., did not contest the election.¹⁷

When Luna claimed his seat at the opening of the 47th Congress (1881–1883), he received the committee assignment Mariano Otero had held in the previous Congress. The Committee on Coinage, Weights, and Measures had jurisdiction over the standardization of weights and measurements and over any legislation affecting currency. Though not eagerly sought after by most House Members, the assignment was useful to Delegates from states with large mining interests, such as New Mexico. Like many other Territorial Delegates, Luna worked largely behind the scenes, not in the public eye making floor speeches. Typical of new Members, he focused on constituent services, submitting bills for pension relief and resolving land claims.¹⁸ Luna submitted two bills to clarify land grant rights; one of the bills, H.R. 1923, was submitted as a substitute on Luna’s behalf by Representative Romualdo Pacheco of California, chairman of the Committee on Private Land Claims.¹⁹ Luna also submitted H.R. 1922 to provide for the formation of a state government in the territory. The bill was referred to the Judiciary Committee, where it eventually died at the end of the congressional term. Luna submitted H.R. 7443 to amend the Organic Act of New Mexico by modifying Texas’ northern and western boundaries to settle border disputes that had festered since the Compromise of 1850.²⁰

Luna sought a second term in the 48th Congress (1883–1885), telling a reporter he had “been importuned by a number of friends to consent to run, and after repeated importunities had finally given his consent.” Bucking the unspoken expectation that Territorial Delegates serve only one term, Luna acknowledged that while he had not voiced his disagreement with the custom to “rapidly rotate the incumbent out of office ... he had always thought it a bad practice, [because] a delegate could hardly get to work effectively in a single term of congress.”²¹ Luna’s opponent was Democrat Francisco Manzanares, a successful entrepreneur-turned-politician. The press portrayed Manzanares as the unknown candidate, echoing

Luna that he was better qualified because of his familiarity with Washington, D.C. Although many Territorial Delegates of the era had been successful businessmen, one observer wrote of Manzanares, “A man who has devoted the better ... part of his life to his own private affairs cannot be expected to take up and successfully fill a new and uncongenial position.” Moreover, this critic believed that Manzanares lacked “opinions on grave public questions.”²² Although Luna’s campaign activity was hamstrung by his convalescence from a debilitating illness, he was described by an observer as “so well known throughout the territory that he needs no introduction ... [being] personally acquainted with almost everyone of weight.”²³

Luna prevailed over Manzanares, with 53 to 47 percent of the vote, and served for the first year of the 48th Congress (1883–1885).²⁴ But while the territory certified the election, Manzanares disputed the results, charging that there had been voting irregularities in several counties, most notably in Luna’s political base of Valencia County. One political observer, while absolving Luna of direct involvement, suggested that his political patron José Francisco Chaves was responsible for instigating “frauds committed by irresponsible parties ... in Bernalillo and Valencia counties.”²⁵ Manzanares appealed to the House Committee on Elections, which was controlled by the new Democratic majority and favorably disposed toward his complaint. The committee reviewed evidence from different precincts, closely examining inconsistencies in poll books that suggested partial or complete forgeries of voting returns.

Meanwhile, Luna’s term of service was consumed by the contested election, though he continued to serve on the Committee on Coinage, Weights, and Measures and submitted relief bills for constituents.²⁶ In its final report, the House Committee on Elections disqualified 2,357 votes it deemed fraudulent, swinging the election to Manzanares by a margin of more than 900 votes.²⁷ Luna’s congressional service ended when the House concurred with the committee’s findings and seated Manzanares on March 5, 1884. Miguel Otero, Jr., whose father had

considered appealing the 1880 election against Luna on similar grounds, noted approvingly, “When the frauds and stealing were shown, Francisco A. Manzanares secured his seat, to the entire satisfaction of the people of New Mexico.”²⁸ The episode ended tragically when Melchior Luna, one of Luna’s relatives, fatally wounded Manuel Sanchez, a Manzanares supporter, following an argument. According to a witness, “Harsh words followed between the men, whereupon Luna drew his Colt’s forty-five caliber revolver and sent a bullet through Sanchez’s body, entering in the breast and coming out the back.” Sanchez died the following morning.²⁹

After his departure from the House, Luna returned to New Mexico to focus on his business activities. In 1892 he served as a delegate to the Republican National Convention in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He also succeeded his late brother as sheriff of Valencia County, serving until his death in Peralta, New Mexico, on November 20, 1892, of complications from what was likely dysentery.³⁰

FOR FURTHER READING

Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, “Tranquilino Luna,” <http://bioguide.congress.gov>.

NOTES

- 1 Carlos Brazil Ramirez, “The Hispanic Political Elite in Territorial New Mexico: A Study of Classical Colonialism,” (Ph.D. diss., University of California–Santa Barbara, 1979): 300. The 1860 Census notes that Antonio Luna’s personal estate was valued at \$63,500. See *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Population Schedule*, Los Lunas, Valencia, New Mexico Territory, Roll M653_716, page 661, <http://search.ancestrylibrary.com> (accessed 6 May 2010).
- 2 W. G. Ritch, *Legislative Blue Book of New Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1968; reprint of 1882 edition): 100–103. Baca served in the First Legislative Assembly (1851–1852) and in the territorial council of the Third and Fourth Legislative Assemblies (1853–1855).
- 3 “Tranquilino Luna,” in Maurilio E. Vigil, *Los Patronos: Profiles of Hispanic Political Leaders in New Mexico History* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1980): 77–79.
- 4 “Our Next Delegate,” 5 August 1880, (Santa Fe) *Daily New Mexican*: 4.
- 5 “Tranquilino Luna,” 5 August 1880, (Santa Fe) *Daily New Mexican*: 1; “Our Next Delegate”; Tranquilino Luna, “Luna’s Acceptance,” 25 August 1880 *Campaign Bulletin*: 1. One article notes that some of the Valencia County Democrats attempted to sabotage the deal but that Luna’s intervention preserved the agreement that Otero would be the nominee.
- 6 Howard R. Lamar, *The Far Southwest, 1846–1912: A Territorial History*, rev. ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000): 88. According to Lamar, Territorial Delegate elections revealed “the multitudinous factions that split [local politicians] into two temporary parties.” Because “Whigs were in national office when New Mexico became a territory, a large number of the first American politicians ... declared loyalty to that party. When the [Franklin M.] Pierce administration assumed office in 1853, however, many local Whigs conveniently took refuge under the rubric ‘National Democrat.’ Those in opposition ... were called ... regular Democrats. Rather than parties, New Mexico had cliques, usually led by one man and generally organized for the specific purpose of winning an election or controlling patronage.”
- 7 “Apart from Politics,” 6 October 1880, (Santa Fe) *The Daily New Mexican*: 2. Some sources say the Otero family left New Mexico in 1862, whereas others give a date as late as 1864. In light of the Unionist reprisals that occurred after the Confederate occupation of the territory, 1862 or 1863 seems to be the most plausible date.
- 8 See Lamar, *The Far Southwest, 1846–1912: A Territorial History*: 123–133. The land grant issue involved two vexing questions: How could numerous grants from three distinct governments (Spain, Mexico, and New Mexico) be recognized, and under which legal tradition, Anglo-American or Spanish, would they be recognized? According to Lamar, there were three kinds of grants, “one to a community, usually for grazing purposes, a second to an individual for some outstanding service ... and a third to the various Indian pueblos.” When the first U.S. Surveyor General came to New Mexico in 1854, he faced a challenge of settling “over one thousand claims ... of which 197 involved large private grants,” with contradictory instructions from Congress. The net result was the lack of “a public domain in New Mexico, while ... it guaranteed that long legal battles climaxed by acts of Congress would characterize the history of the New Mexican land system.” Until the establishment of a Court of Private Land Claims in 1891, pitched legal battles between different groups were the norm for settling land grants. For a detailed history of the land grant issue, see Malcolm Ebricht, *Land Grants and Lawsuits in Northern New Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994).
- 9 “Otero’s Pretensions,” 1 October 1880, (Santa Fe) *The Daily New Mexican*: 2. Critics charged that “nineteen grants in New Mexico were confirmed by one act of Congress while Otero sat in his Delegate’s seat and listened without objection or protest.” The *Daily New Mexican* estimated that during Otero’s tenure, “no less than two thirds of all land grants ever confirmed in New Mexico were patented ... [which] included by far the largest land grants,

- the Maxwell, Mora, Beck, and Ortiz among them.” One article (18 October 1880, (Santa Fe) *The Daily New Mexican*: 1) asserts that not only was the “Mora grant ... confirmed while Otero represented New Mexico in Congress ... he owns a part of it. Will his friends say that he did not exert himself to have this grant confirmed?” For a detailed description of the land grants that were confirmed during Otero’s terms as Delegate, see “Facts for the Miners,” 29 October 1880, (Santa Fe) *The Daily New Mexican*: 2.
- 10 “Otero’s Pretensions.”
 - 11 No title, 3 October 1880, (Santa Fe) *The Daily New Mexican*: 2. The article quotes Otero as saying to the House, “Gentlemen, do not judge me by the rest of my race. I am not utterly ignorant nor have I been reared in degradation and immorality; though I am a native of New Mexico.” See also “Friend or Foe,” 21 October 1880, (Santa Fe) *The Daily New Mexican*: 2. The themes of Otero’s ignoring the needs of New Mexicans during his tenure by casting a blind eye toward revising the land grant system and his setting himself apart from his *Hispano* constituents dogged him throughout the campaign.
 - 12 “Put Up or Shut Up,” 18 October 1880, (Santa Fe) *The Daily New Mexican*: 2.
 - 13 No title, 23 October 1880, *Las Vegas Weekly Optic*: 2.
 - 14 See, for example, Lamar, *The Far Southwest, 1846–1912: A Territorial History*: 174–177.
 - 15 “Luna at Home,” 26 October 1880, (Santa Fe) *The Daily New Mexican*: 2.
 - 16 “Votes cast for delegate to 47th Congress. Statement as canvassed by the Secretary of the Territory,” (National Archives Microfilm Publication M364, Roll 1) Interior Department Territorial Papers, New Mexico, 1851–1914, Records of the Department of the Interior, Record Group 48, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD (NACP). Official election statistics also were published in “The Official Count,” 22 November 1880, *Santa Fe Weekly New Mexican*: 3. Vote totals were 10,835 for Luna and 9,562 for Otero.
 - 17 Miguel Otero, Jr., *My Life on the Frontier: 1864–1882* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987; reprint of 1935 edition): 270–271. Almost 50 years after the 1880 election, Otero, Jr., remained bitter about his father’s defeat, as evidenced in Otero, Jr.’s autobiography: “The result showed that under any fair and honest count my father would have been declared elected by a handsome majority, but through the basest and most barefaced frauds ever practiced in any country, he was robbed of his victory, and Tranquilino Luna declared elected.”
 - 18 David T. Canon et al., *Committees in the U.S. Congress, 1789 to 1946: Member Assignments*, vol. 3 (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2002): 653; *Congressional Record*, Index, 47th Cong., 1st sess.: 256; *Congressional Record*, Index, 47th Cong., 2nd sess.: 96–97.
 - 19 *Congressional Record*, House, 47th Cong., 1st sess. (19 December 1881): 207; *Congressional Record*, House, 47th Cong., 1st sess. (6 June 1882): 4581; *Congressional Record*, Index, 47th Cong., 1st sess.: 589, 711. Luna submitted H.R. 1923 on December 19, 1881; Pacheco resubmitted the bill as a substitute amendment (H.R. 6404) on June 19, 1882, to the Committee on Private Land Claims, where it died.
 - 20 *Congressional Record*, House, 47th Cong. 2nd sess. (29 January 1883): 1735.
 - 21 “Hon. Tranquilino Luna,” 4 August 1882, *Las Vegas Daily Gazette*: 4.
 - 22 “Manzanares and Luna,” 18 October 1882, (Santa Fe) *Daily New Mexican*: 2.
 - 23 “Hon. Tranquilino Luna,” 3 November 1882, (Santa Fe) *Daily New Mexican*: 2.
 - 24 “General Election 1882—Votes as returned, counted, and declared for Delegate to 48th Congress,” (M364, Roll 1) Territorial Papers of the United States, New Mexico, 1851–1914, RG 48, NACP. The results, 15,062 votes for Luna and 13,378 votes for Manzanares, were certified 29 November 1882.
 - 25 “Manzanares vs. Luna,” 6 March 1884, (Santa Fe) *Daily New Mexican*: 2; Martha Durant Read “Colonel José Francisco Chaves: A Short Biography of the Father of the New Mexico Statehood Movement,” *Southwest Heritage* 8, no. 5 (Winter 1978–1979): 18; Lamar, *The Far Southwest, 1846–1912: A Territorial History*: 142–143. Chaves was dogged by charges that he ran a political machine out of Valencia County throughout his career. He was also charged with colluding with the Santa Fe Ring, although he actively worked against the Ring on a number of occasions.
 - 26 *Congressional Record* Index, 48th Cong., 1st sess.: 268. For more details about the 1884 contested election case, see Lamar, *The Far Southwest, 1846–1912: A Territorial History*: 142–143.
 - 27 Chester Rowell, *A Historical and Legal Digest of All the Contested Election Cases in the House of Representatives of the United States from the First to the Fifty-Sixth Congress, 1789–1901* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976; reprint of 1901 edition): 399–400.
 - 28 Otero, Jr., *My Life on the Frontier: 1864–1882*: 272–273.
 - 29 “Fatal Tragedy Growing out of Election Contest,” 24 February 1883, *Las Vegas Daily Gazette*: 2. It is unclear what charges, if any, were brought against Melchior Luna.
 - 30 “Tranquilino Luna,” in Vigil, *Los Patrones*: 77–78; “At the Capital: Blaine’s Resignation and the Sensation and Comment It Caused,” 5 June 1892, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*: 2; “New Mexico’s Loss,” 22 November 1892, *Los Angeles Times*: 2. Luna died “after an illness of one month with inflammation of the bowels, brought on from flux.”